

# ADOLESCENTS' MENSTRUATION: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

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## SUMMARY

600 adolescent girls were interviewed through a questionnaire as to their feeling regarding menstruation and allied matters as well as the practices and beliefs going along with it. It was found that 34.6% adolescents had depression in response to menarche. 22.1% were indifferent and 3.83% thought it to be sinful. Subsequently nearly 57% accepted it with an indifference. Nearly 80% respondents practised some form of taboo during menstruation. 77.3% girls tend to use household clothes for menstrual flow, 22.6% used sanitary napkins. Mothers influenced and guided the menstruation related responses in 84% whereas 12% were guided by friends.

## Introduction

At a stressful phase in life, like that of adolescence, menarche and menstruation are bound to elicit a tremendous psychological response in the girls. Also, in a conservative society like ours, where these matters are hardly discussed freely and maturely there are bound to be some practices, customs and mores associated with these events. This study is carried out with an aim to know about the adolescents perceptions and feelings regarding menstruation and things she is made to practice in this phase.

## Materials and Methods

600 randomly selected adolescent

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girls of ages ranging from 13 to 19 years were given a detailed questionnaire regarding their perceptions about menstruation and their practices during and related to menstruation. They were previously briefed regarding the aims and objectives of the study. These subjects were from a large cross-section of the society viz. co-education schools, female students from 1st and 2nd M.B.B.S., first and second year university students, as well as nursing students.

Complete secrecy about the person volunteering the information was ensured and only voluntary respondents were enrolled for the study.

## Results

As shown in Table I, varied preceptions and reactions prevailed amongst the

respondents to their first periods. 34.6% had a feeling of depression. This they tend to attribute to the fact that now they will have to behave like adults and stop behaving like children. Amidst an extension to depression some commented that they felt terrible.

TABLE - I  
REACTION TO FIRST PERIODS

Reaction	No.	%
Pleasure	37	6.16
Revulsion	96	16.00
Shame	4	0.66
Depression	208	34.66
Confusion	2	0.33
Nuisance	17	12.83
Fear	7	1.16
Sin	23	3.83
Indifference	133	22.16

Those that felt that it was a nuisance did so as their normal working capacity was getting affected.

The revulsion amongst 16% was at times intense enough to make them hate being a woman. In one patient, this climaxed to an utter frustration and she even thought of castrating herself.

TABLE - II  
REACTION TO SUBSEQUENT PERIODS

Reaction	No.	%
Indifference	345	57.5
Depression	42	20.3
Pleasure	58	9.6
Sinful	21	3.5
Revulsion	54	9.0

Though depression was a dominant reaction to the earlier periods, subsequently around 60% girls viewed the period with indifference. A very small increase in viewing menstruation with pleasure was also noticed.

TABLE - III  
TABOOS PRACTISED

	Taboos (Yes)	Taboos (No)
No.	482.00	118.00
%	80.33	19.66

As shown in Table III nearly 80% of respondents practised some sort of taboo or the other. These included avoiding holy places, not touching other people, not touching books during the phase, etc. as they felt they were unclean in some way during menstruation.

TABLE - IV  
HYGIENE PRACTISED IN MENSES

	No.	%
Cloth pieces	464	77.33
S.T./Pads	136	22.66
Both	22	3.60

77.3% girls, on being so trained by mothers or elder sisters, used household cloth pieces to deal with the menstrual flow. Around 80% of these acknowledged that they were shy of buying sanitary towels and for 20.82% the cost of sanitary napkins was also a factor for their continuing the use of cloth pieces rather than the sanitary towels or pads. 3.6% used either, depending on the availability. Some of these used sanitary pads for first two-three days and then switched over to cloth pieces.

Table V shows the dominant source of information which guided the perceptions and practices related to menstruation. Mothers (84%) were the most predominant source, followed by friends in 12% of girls.

TABLE - V  
SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Source	No.	%
Mother	504	83.66
Sister	44	7.30
Friend	72	12.00
Books	11	1.83
Teacher	3	0.50
Movie	4	0.66
Father	1	0.16
Sister in-law	4	0.66
Auntie	7	1.16
Grandmother	1	0.16

### Discussion

A vast array of beliefs and emotions are involved with menstruation, especially menarche and adolescent menstruation.

The mere fact of the commencement of menstruation leading the adolescent to believe that she is no more a child and is expected to behave like a grown up, lead 34.6% to a state of depression. Prasad and Sharma (1972) report that 83.4% patients in their series had some form of emotional disturbance at menarche. However, they have not specified these disturbances. Not only depression in its mild form was present in this study, but there were 14 patients (2.3%) who actually reported that they even developed suicidal tendencies. However for 6% of the respondents menstruation was a pleasure. The same reasons which brought depression in the former group, gave happiness for these. They were happy that now they are grown up and so can be counted amongst adults. How each individual including an adolescent responds emotionally to an important event like menarche, depends on a vast number of factors. This explains a variety of responses amongst them.

However, once the cycle sets in after 6 months or so, more than 50% of them reported an indifference towards menstruation. Depression was soon resolved as is shown from 34.6% having initial depression decreasing to 20.30% as shown in Tables I & II.

Myth and superstitions rate high, even amongst the so called educated. 592 i.e. 98.6% respondents had educated parents and still 80% of them observed some form of taboo or the other, during menstruation. The original idea of these taboos might have been to give the woman some rest by isolating her. But it got transformed into the generation of a sense of embarrassment and outcast as was expressed by most respondents practising these taboos.

Use of sanitary napkins though hygienic has still not become very popular with the masses as is shown in table III. The mere fact that the lady is shy to buy it from a shop shows the conservatism in the society. The cost factor was also vital. Compared to the readily available household piece of cloth, sanitary napkins, any day, are costlier. Thus some patients preferred to use sanitary napkins for the initial days when the flow was heavy and then for "maintenance", they switched over to household cloth.

Mothers required to be educated equally if not more than their daughters, for they are the guides in these matters in 84% of cases. Advertisements and movies have a potential, but in the present series guided only 0.66% of respondents as shown in Table V.

### Reference

Prasad B.C., Sharma U. : *J. of Obstet. & Gynec. of India*, 0.22:220, 1972.